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THE NATION'S LOSS,

AND

ITS LESSONS.

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The Nation's Loss and its Lessons.

AN OCCASIONAL DISCOURSE,

ON THE

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN,

BY A. S. PATTON,

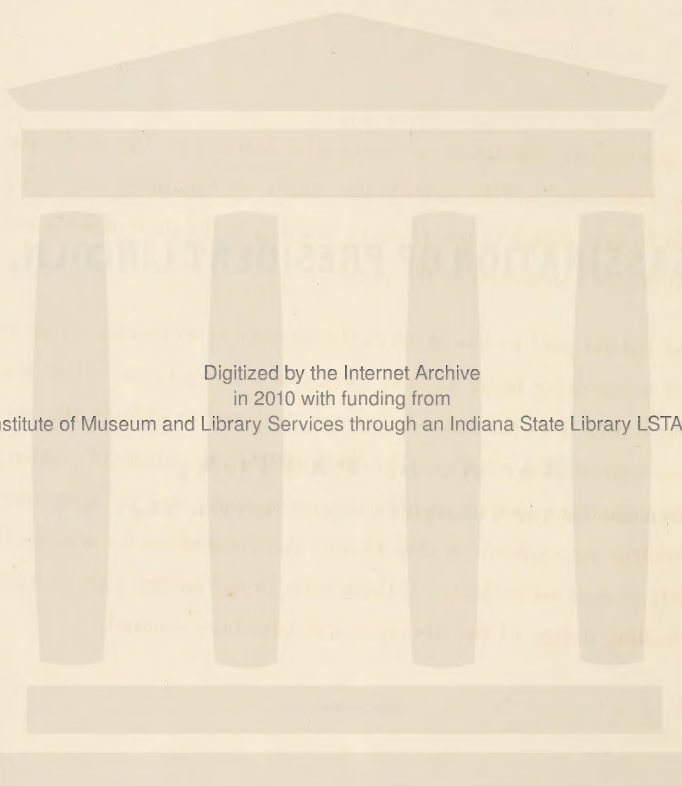
MINISTER OF THE TABERNACLE BAPTIST CHURCH, UTICA, N. Y.



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NOTE.

At the urgent solicitation of many who listened to the accompanying Discourse, and to gratify the desire of hundreds who were unable to gain access to our place of worship at the time of its delivery, it is now committed to the press.

The tribute paid to our MARTYR PRESIDENT is an unaffected offering of a sorrowing heart to true greatness and goodness; while the lessons drawn from the nation's loss are designed to exhibit the barbarous spirit of the rebellion; to vindicate the execution of justice; to strengthen the love of republican government; and to encourage a confiding recognition of that Divine Administration to which all earthly powers are subject. If these ends, in any measure, are gained, the leading design of the discourse will have been secured.

THE NATION'S LOSS AND ITS LESSONS.

JEREMIAH XLVIII. 17.

"All ye that are about him, bemoan him; And all ye that know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken!"

For a little more than a week—but Oh, how grief has lengthened the time!—we have been living under a dark cloud. The weight of a crushing affliction has been resting upon our hearts, and, if, for a few moments, we have been able to forget our distress, again and again it has come swelling back upon our bosoms until, with one of old, we have all been forced to cry—"Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts, all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me!" From a serene sky we have been startled by a dreadful thunderbolt, and when we were about to lift to heaven our glad psalm of thanksgiving, suddenly our hearts were saddened and our voices drowned in tears.

Into every waking hour thoughts of sorrow now press themselves, and every day we are made sadder and sadder by an increasing realization of our loss. From the dreadful moment which broke to us the awful intelligence of our beloved President's assassination to this in which

I am now speaking, we have thought of little else than of that murderous deed, and of our great bereavement. Under the shock of a crime so horrible and atrocious we still tremble, and, with unfeigned sorrow, we are compelled still to weep.

When, in days past, other public men have been removed by death, it has been customary to show them appropriate outward marks of *respect*, but never has the nation *mourned* over a bereavement as it mourns to-day for the loss of ABRAHAM LINCOLN. It is as though death had entered every home, and had taken away the most loved one of every family, and so, sitting around our darkened hearth-stones, "all bemoan him; and all that know his name say, How is the strong staff broken!"

The obsequies of last Wednesday were far from exhausting our sympathies. The booming of cannon; the tolling of bells; the drooping of banners; the display of funereal drapery; the crowded streets; and the imposing solemnity of a vast procession, after all, only seemed like a mockery of our sorrow; for, rising above all expression through outward forms and symbols, there was unutterable anguish in almost every bosom, the eyes of the people were blinded with tears, and a nation's mighty heart was throbbing with such pangs as it had never felt before.

Nor can we wonder at the depth and sincerity of this sorrow; for our beloved President had enshrined himself not merely in the confidence and respect of the people, but in their heart of hearts. They loved him, they were devoted to him, they had unshaken faith in his honesty, they knew him to be a true patriot, and, because he was so humble, so prudent, so wise, so humane, so

God-fearing, they looked up to him as to a father, and they gave him their warmest affection.

But though so generally beloved by the nation, and though thus panoplied in almost every virtue, there were yet those base enough, while he was living, to revile him and, at length, a wretch in human form was found wicked enough to murder him.

With a trusting, noble, fearless heart he had never hesitated to mingle with the people. He had gone to the front, and made himself accessible to all at home. He had shown himself ready to answer every reasonable summons, and was not afraid of any living man ; for so ingenuous and kind was *his* heart that, as he was incapable of doing any one an injury, so he had no suspicion of suffering evil. And as we think of the purity and gentleness and magnanimity so conspicuously exhibited in every trait of his character, and in every act of his administration it does seem as though, in all this wide and wicked world, no man, knowing him, could be found base enough deliberately to purpose his death, or with nerve enough to raise his hand and point a murderous pistol at the head of that meek and merciful man.

Thinking of the enormity of the crime and the beautiful character of the victim, it does seem as though hell could hardly have furnished a fiend wicked enough to do so bloody a deed. No wonder the villainous assassin crept behind him. No wonder, as he confronted him in the street only a little while before, he suffered him to pass ; for that honest eye and that benignant face so declared his good will, and made such an impression of true manliness on all who saw it, that, meeting his gaze, the worst of

devils might have been disarmed and thwarted in so hellish a purpose.

But there was a wretch whose wicked heart was prompted to the deed and whose murderous arm was nerved for its execution, and, in a moment, the foul and bloody act was done, and thus—

“Treason did his worst!
A hand accursed
Has made the Nation orphan by a blow;
Has turned its hymns of joy to wail and woe.
While all suspicion slept,
The Assassin crept
Into the circle where, in guardless state
The simple chief in friendly converse sate,
And in an instant, ere a hand could rise,
The Nation’s Hope a slaughtered Martyr lies!”

The horror of the deed seems to be not a little enhanced by the time of its perpetration. In the midst of scenic gayeties, in the moment of hilarity resulting from dramatic delineations, the shocking act is done, and from the amusing spectacle of a comedy, a terrified audience is suddenly called to witness a real and bloody tragedy.

Nor was the transition less strange and startling to those at a distance from the dreadful scene. As a people we were in the midst of rejoicings over recent victories. The unparalleled triumphs of our arms, the fall of Richmond, the surrender of the army of Virginia, the restoration of the old flag on Sumpter, the prospect of the speedy and utter destruction of the Confederacy, and the bright and animating signs of restored liberty and a righteous peace, all contributed to make it a time of peculiar exultation—when, sad to tell! the cruel assassin struck down the life of the man to whose firmness, hu-

manity and inflexible devotion to principle we mainly owed the accomplishment of these great results.

Oh, how suddenly and from what heights of joy were we cast down! When we heard that the life of our beloved President had been taken, what cared we for the raising of Sumpter's flag? How almost worthless seemed all our brilliant victories! And checked in our boisterous cheers, our shouts were changed to wailing, and sobs and tears told how dearly we loved ABRAHAM LINCOLN, and how deeply we felt his loss.

But he is gone, and even while we are here to-night, they are bearing him tenderly to his last resting place; with an afflicted nation for mourners, and leaving behind him a name that all coming generations will be proud to honor.

"A Martyr to the cause of man,
His blood is Freedom's eucharist,
And in the world's great hero list,
His name shall lead the van."

Let us thank God that he lived to accomplish so much, that he was permitted to see the war for the nation's life virtually brought to a close—that, under God, he was successful in striking off the shackles of four millions of bondmen, and that, by his unfaltering devotion, he had not only won the affection of all loyal Americans, but had, at length, challenged the respect of the civilized world.

Carry him, then, ye that are charged with the solemn office, carry him to his grave—and, when ye lay him down to rest, list! and ye shall not only hear the groans of the widow and the sobs of the fatherless, but the bitter cries of a nation bereft of one it loved best among

men; and through all coming time, his simple but sublime character shall be revered, and, long as our government shall endure, Patriotism, and Liberty, and Virtue, and Religion, will come to his tomb to weep, and to cast upon it their costliest garlands.

Bear with me now while I endeavor to commend to your calm consideration a few of the impressive lessons of this great loss.

I. And I remark, in the first place, that *the murder of our President is but a crowning illustration of the desperate and brutal spirit of the rebellion.*

The bloody act of this assassin is of one nature with all the barbarous acts previously committed by savage traitors, and we know that in the South no later than December 1st, 1864, money was called for to be devoted to this very object,—the names of Lincoln and Johnson, and Seward being given as the selected victims of assassination.* Nor was this infamous proposition rebuked by the Southern people, but rather approved.

* Soon after Mr. Lincoln's reëlection the following appeared first in *The Selma Dispatch* (Ala.) and was copied unrebuked into other Rebel organs:

“ONE MILLION DOLLARS WANTED, TO HAVE PEACE BY THE 1ST OF MARCH.—If the citizens of the Southern Confederacy will furnish me with the cash, or good securities for the sum of one million dollars, I will cause the lives of Abraham Lincoln, William H. Seward, and Andrew Johnson to be taken by the 1st of March next. This will give us peace, and satisfy the world that cruel tyrants cannot live in a ‘land of liberty.’ If this is not accomplished, nothing will be claimed beyond the sum of fifty thousand dollars, in advance, which is supposed to be necessary to reach and slaughter the three villains.

“I will give, myself, one thousand dollars toward this patriotic purpose. Every one wishing to contribute will address box X, Cahawba, Ala. December 1, 1864. X.”

These fiendish assassins, therefore, were but the humble executors of the purpose of other men who have always made their appeal to dirks and pistols and bludgeons. It was this same savage spirit that struck down Sumner, in the Senate Chamber, and that, in fifty thousand cases, during the progress of this bloody war, has, in the most diabolical manner, either starved men to death, or, in cruel guerrilla warfare, taken life with the bullet.

Tell me not that the leading men of the South disapprove these acts. Tell me not that they mourn for the death of LINCOLN—it is what they have wished for, and as their barbarous spirit led them to applaud the cowardly Brooks, so, in their secret souls, they to-day approve the miscreant murderer Booth.

And in this connection, fidelity to truth constrains me to say that there are men here in the North who are not guiltless in relation to this assassination. Show me one who, with tongue or pen—while our noble President was working with unfaltering energy to put down this rebellion—did nothing to help him, but dared to style that tender-hearted and generous man a tyrant, and you show me one on whose conscience, to-day, rests the blood of ABRAHAM LINCOLN. That man helped this hired assassin by fostering in his malignant heart the false and base idea that our Martyr President *was* a tyrant, and, therefore, deserved to die. Oh, if I had spoken of that good, gentle, long-suffering dead man, as some in the range of my knowledge have done, before making a display of crape, and walking, with solemn face, in a funeral procession, I would go down upon my knees before my country and my God, and penitently cry to both for forgiveness. And, until they do this, all their signs of mourning only

go to prove their heartless hypocrisy. To all such we say, we want first not your *condolence*, but your confession. The presence of a few such persons sadly marred the obsequies of the past week; for no one could look upon them without being reminded of Southey's familiar lines :

“These mourners here, who from their carriages—
Gape at the gaping crowd, a good March wind
Were to be pray'd for now, to lend their eyes
Some decent rheum.”

And yet, it is not too late. A brief space is still given them for repentance, and every dictate of an honest manhood calls upon them, ere the remains of our President shall pass through the city, to acknowledge the shameful wrong they have done him; and then, with some show of consistency, they may modestly avow their sorrow for his death, and, with less compunction, may look upon his coffin as it shall here rest on its way to the grave. And let me just say, if any man now present feels at all offended by these suggestions, without going back to antecedents, and without the slightest fear of mistake, I take that man's complaint as positive evidence of his guilt; for no one who has been truly loyal to the government, and who does not stand condemned, will feel himself in the least impeached by these reflections.

II. Another lesson of this sad loss is *the duty of executing justice in the vindication of violated law*.

It is not our prerogative to administer *vengeance*. Neither is it our privilege to substitute *mercy* for justice. But we are required to stand by law, and insist on its impartial execution. Treason, we hold, is a crime to be punished, not pardoned. “Mercy without justice is

crime ;” but, as Judge Allison, of Philadelphia, said the other day, upon adjourning the Court, “ We had almost forgot, in the disposition too much manifested recently in high quarters, to deal leniently with the rebels, that though there is such a thing as mercy, there is also *justice*, which should be meted out to these men, some of whom should hang.”

The crime of the wretch who murdered our President is certainly most enormous and shocking ; and nothing can shield *him* from punishment. His act, however, was but one fruit of the rebellion, and it would be little less than a mockery of justice to bring him to the gallows, and yet leave unpunished the men whose wicked machinations and crimsoned hands have for four long years been directed against all law and government, and on whose souls, to-day, rest the stains of your father’s, your husband’s, your son’s, and your brother’s blood.

Nor is there anything approaching vindictiveness in demanding the condign punishment of these guilty wretches. It is but the dictate of simple justice. *Clemency* to such is *cruelty* to others ; and I am bold to say that the insulted majesty of the nation cannot be vindicated, neither can the wrongs of the widows, and the tears of the orphans of our brave soldiers, now sleeping their last sleep beneath southern soil, be avenged until the intelligent and responsible leaders of this cruel rebellion are punished. Let stern justice, then, be meted out. Yes, hang them ! hang them as high as Haman, and let unborn generations loathe their names, and heap increasing infamy upon their memories !

And now, at last, the people are roused to this conviction, and, with a deeper sense of justice impressed upon

them, they are saying, Let us have done with this policy of clemency, Let the iron hand of justice now fall upon these cruel men. In obedience to righteous law, avenge the death of our starved prisoners, the blood of our slain brothers, and the shocking murder of our President. The supremacy of law calls for this, and, at the same time, the security of the future imperatively demands it. A few northern men, I know, are still begging mercy for these heartless traitors. Nor can we account for their course, except by supposing that either they are the blind adherents of perverted systems of morals and politics, or else, being in sympathy with treason, they have themselves a wholesome fear of justice!

But however some may feel upon this subject, it is certain the great mass of the American people, understanding how terrible a crime rebellion is, and because they are truly loyal to the government, are calling loudly and earnestly for the exercise of stern, inflexible justice. For mere revenge we would do nothing, but, whatever penalty is required by law, let the instigators of our national troubles have it to the bitter end. Plainly, God is saying to us, by his providences to-day, what he said to his people of old, “Execute *judgment* upon them *speedily*, whether it be unto *death*, or to *banishment*, or to *confiscation* of goods, or to *imprisonment*.” Ezra vii. 26.

III. Still another lesson suggested by the nation’s sad loss is, *the soundness of our Republican form of Government*.

Under other forms of administration, such an event as the assassination of its head, would have threatened anarchy and revolution. But, under the constitutional gov-

ernment of the United States, deeply as the crime affects all our hearts, no injurious effect is discovered on our political structure. The law of the land is still supreme, and our destiny is unchanged. The Republic is based on enduring foundations—order, justice, humanity, freedom, equality—and while these principles endure in the hearts of men, the Republic must stand. Neither accident nor design can take away this controlling and sustaining power. Insurrection, formidably armed, may attempt it, but the power of the people triumphs. Murder of the chief of the nation may purpose it, but the calm operation of the laws immediately invests the authority in a new representative of its power, and the course of government moves on undisturbed by the perturbations which had threatened to shake the foundations of all social and political order.

And thus we see how weak and wicked the men are who thought, by such dreadful measures, to accomplish their guilty ends ; for, instead of embarrassing, or subverting the government, they have rather infused into it new vigor,—the utter failure of their dreadful purpose giving a most impressive illustration of the power of the nation to repel all the assaults of its enemies. Ten days ago there were parties in the land ; to-day the nation is closely bound together, party strife is hushed, and we are united as we were on the day that saw Sumpter fall.

Oh, let us devoutly thank God, then, that, while we mourn for our martyred President, we are permitted to rejoice in the downfall of treason, and to feel assured of the increased strength, and perpetuity of our institutions ! Heaven be praised ! The grand crisis has come and gone. The time of real danger is passed, and, after all our unspeakable sacrifices, we know, at last, that we shall live.

The right has triumphed ; the authority of the Republic is vindicated ; rebellion is crushed ; the national unity is secured ; and, to crown all, FREEDOM has become universal !

And now, with favoring winds, and the benedictions of all the good, the noble Ship of State ploughs her way on, defiant of danger, and freighted with the greatest interests and hopes. Beautiful sight ! And, as we gaze admiringly upon her, we cannot help saying :

“Sail on, sail on, O ship of State !
Sail on, O Union, strong and great,
Humanity, with all its fears,
With all its hopes of future years
Is hanging breathless on thy fate.
Sail on, nor fear to breast the sea,
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith, triumphant o’er our fears—
Are all with thee, are all with thee !”

IV. And, as a final lesson of our dreadful loss, let me counsel you to *cherish unshaken confidence in God*.

Our destiny as a nation is in His hands, and, thus far, He has led us safely on—bringing us through the most fiery trials. To Him we owe all our past successes,—the great victories of the war, and the more glorious moral and political results evolved in our country’s struggle. And to Him, also, we must tremblingly and penitently look as the course of our sorrows and our troubles. Not willingly, however, but for our *good* He has afflicted us, and if His long-suffering had not been great, and His mercy infinite, ere this we should have been utterly destroyed. If, at the time we were suffering from reverses, He had permitted the rebel murderer’s hand to

fall upon our great leader, the nation's existence would have been in the most imminent danger. But, to accomplish His own designs, that valued life was spared, and the sublime work that God gave ABRAHAM LINCOLN to do was done,—*fully* done, and *well* done.

For other service the Almighty has other instruments, and, if a less loving and gentle heart is necessary to a proper and final adjustment of our difficulties,—if a heavier hand and a sterner man are needed to inflict impartial and terrible justice on those who have been seeking our country's life, then, though we weep over our bereavement, we will accept the sad event, with all its consequences, as a thing *permitted* of God, who, in His infinite wisdom and love, will certainly overrule it for His own glory, and for our greatest good. In His hands we all are to be used or set aside at His sovereign pleasure; and just as a sculptor takes up now a chissel, and now a graver, and now a file, and does not explain to you or me who stand watching him, why he thus lays down one and takes up another, but works steadily on to produce what his genius has created; so our God will work out His great purposes with one or another at His will, and, in the grand unfoldings of the future, we shall all acknowledge, and wonder, and magnify the wisdom, and goodness, and power of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own pleasure.

Nor, as regards the interests of our country, shall we have long to wait. God's purposes are ripening fast. In a little while everything will be cleared up, and, then, in His ways that are now "past finding out," we shall only trace the proofs of His unbounded knowledge and mercy.

Even now, under the Divine favor, we hail the cheering signs that are to usher in the long sought day of our deliverance. Yes, I seem to see, flying through the heavens, an angel whose name is Peace—she comes so near that our brows are fanned by the rush of air beneath her sun-lit pinions, and while she drops a tear for the past, her lovely face is all radiant with joy for the future. Her mission is to lead us in the glad song of angels—“Glory to God in the highest, on earth, PEACE.” Oh, listen, for already—

“The sounds of war grow fainter, and now cease;
And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibrations,
I hear once more the voice of Christ say PEACE.
PEACE! And no longer from its brazen portals,
The blast of war’s great organ shakes the skies;
But beautiful as songs of the immortals,
The holy melodies of love arise.”

And so, we will not be distrustful nor despair, but hope on, addressing ourselves with all fidelity to the duties of the hour—cultivating a stronger faith in God, and manfully meeting every trial, in this assurance, that the Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble, and that, having ordained signal victory, he will speedily give us a righteous and a lasting peace.

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